CAMP WHITE
GRENADE
II

"Preserving the Past for the Future"

VOLUME 4, NO. 4 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CAMP WHITE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION DECEMBER 1999

LA FORTUNA ADVENTURE

Company I, 361st Infantry, 91st Division

As Officer Candidate Chris Hald walked across the stage at Fort Benning, Georgia, on July 3rd, 1942, to accept his commission in the United States Army, he had no idea that within two years he would be a Captain in command of an infantry company – and that company would be in a desperate fight for its life.

Second Lieutenant Hald was assigned to train with the 91st Division at Camp White, Oregon. In April of 1944, the Division was sent to Italy and placed under the Command of the 5th Army.

As the Division battled up the Italian peninsula against the Germans' strong delaying action, the small communities of Trebbo, Barbarolo and La Fortuna became critical to Allied success. Captain Chris Hald was given the order to secure these towns and cut Highway 65, which would slow the Germans' retreat. October 8 and 9, 1944, near La Fortuna, Italy, were overcast, foggy and wet. Captain Hald's company was 2,000 yards beyond friendly lines – the foremost point of the th Army advance. As the company advanced, they assumed positions in buildings along Highway 65. On several occasions Germans had stopped near these buildings buildings, not realizing they were occupied by American forces. Having penetrated as deeply as he had, Captain Hald found that I Company was in a very confused situation. The Germans roamed up and down the highway at will. Offensive and defensive action became routine for I Company's small unit commanders.

In one instance a German machine-gun squad walked into a building occupied by Sergeant Frank Meyer's platoon. The 7-member German squad was captured but other elements of the force were alerted and a thirty-minute firefight ensued. Fortunately no Americans were killed.

Late one evening Sergeant Meyer found he had lost communications with Captain Hald. The Sergeant decided to personally contact the command post, taking a runner with him. In order to reach it, however, he had to cross Highway 65 via a culvert. On his return trip, he began walking through the culvert, only to discover that he was not alone.In the darkness, he recognized several German soldiers. At the same instant, the Germans spotted Meyer and his runner. Both parties said nothing, just passed each other and melted away into the darkness.

(see back page)

It was an honor to represent the 91st Division, 347th Artillery, Battery "C" with my WWII 1943 Jeep at the old Beagle Firing Range.

COMMANDER'S CORNER

Al Inlow

Dear friends and fellow members:

I would like to introduce the commanding general of today's 91st Division, and commend him for taking time out to visit the military cemetery and memorial in Italy, where the fallen soldiers of World War II are buried. Don't miss his story.

Al Inlow

AL INLOW, COMMANDER
Camp White Historical Association and Museum

Oops!

In our last issue we referred to Mr. Randy Hanes as a Lieutenant in our cover story. Mr. Hanes a Sergeant, not a Lieutenant, with the 300th. We apologize for our mistake.

THE GRENADE II

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The Grenade *accepts suggestions and contributions from readers. If you have a story idea or appropriate event to promote, write Al Inlow at P.O. Box 2373, White City, OR 97503.*

MG BALO 91ST DI

For two weeks last year, Major General Daniel C. Balough and his wife vacationed in Italy and took so time to honor the fallen soldiers of the 91st Division who res not far from the mountains where they died. When America fell in battle during the War to End All Wars and WWII, the were laid to rest in the countries where they fought and died. Major General Balough visited the hallowed ground nestled among the rolling hills of Italy where thousands of members of the 91st Division lie. The American Battlefield Memorial Commission created by Congress in 1923 administers the cemeteries. "We have these all over the world; the countries cede us the land, and we maintain them," said Major General Balough.

"The markers are pure white marble from Cerona. They each have the soldier's rank, date of death and unit number on them. The grounds are perfectly manicured," he continued.

He described his emotions as he walked the grounds. "I walked up and down the rows for a time ... it was sobering. I've been to Shiloh, Vicksburg, and Gettysburg, but this was different. The connection that

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made it different comes when you read the dates and the names; it really brings it home. I found (Congressional Medal of Honor recipient) Sergeant Harmon's grave *(see bottom center)* and knowing his story made it very poignant."

After visiting the memorial, he and his wife drove over the Gigio Pass. The road was close to the trail the 91st Division soldiers fought their way up in 1944. "The mountains just go up and up. Until you see it, you don't get the whole picture of just what these soldiers endured. During the war, the mud was everywhere, and there were no roads." General Balough encouraged any soldiers who have the opportunity to visit Europe to visit the memorial to the soldiers of the 91st Division. "They will not regret it."

"We try to travel every year and have been to Italy before," he explained. "I love to visit Italy because of the people; they are so friendly, and the food is great and the land is beautiful. We have been to other countries but I would return to Italy every year."

Courtesy "The Fir Tree", Spring 99, Vol 35. No. 2.

W. HARMON
362 INF 91 DIV
INIA JULY 12 1944

MEDAL OF HONO

VOLUNTEER CORNER

Richard "Dick" Harley Keller

Richard "Dick" Harley Keller was born in Klamath Falls, Oregon on November 14, 1932. His father owned a motorcycle shop and loved Harley-Davidson motorcycles so much he decided to use "Harley" for his new son's middle name.

Six months after Dick was born his parents decided to move to San Jose, California, his mother's home town. The year was 1933 and the couple had no car, so Dick's father put a sidecar on his motorcycle and built a small trailer. He loaded his wife and six-month-old Dick into the sidecar and the family's possessions into the little trailer, and moved from Klamath Falls to San Jose. Even in the midst of the Depression, the move was unusual enough to attract attention; the family, their motorcycle, sidecar, and trailer made the front page of the San Jose paper.

Dick grew up in San Jose, joined the Air Force in 1950, did his basic training at Lackland AFB in San Antonio, Texas, and was sent to Shepperd AFB for Air Force mechanic school. While there he also went to the B-36 bomber specialist school.

Upon completion, he was sent to Carswell AFB at Fort Worth, where he became a part of the 26th Bomb Squadron, 11th Bomb Wing, 8th Air Force S.A.C., and a crew chief on B-36 bombers.

In 1954 Dick took a discharge as a T/Sgt, served a mechanic's apprenticeship, and went into business with his father, who owned a small shop. Eventually he became a machine shop supervisor at three companies. He moved to Coos Bay in 1986, and then to Medford, where he retired.

When Camp White Military Museum opened its doors on November 1, 1997, Dick became one of our first volunteers. As of October 31, 1999, he had donated a total of 1096 hours. He received a plaque commemorating his service at our first Volunteer Recognition function.

LA FORTUNA ADVENTURE *(continued)*

As Meyer stepped out of the culvert he was challenged by yet another group of German soldiers who, fortunately, didn't recognize his uniform. Meyer, who was fluent in German, replied, and told the German infantrymen to follow him. He hoped to simply walk the soldiers back to the building where he and his troops could capture them. Unfortunately the darkness prevented the American platoon from recognizing Meyer, and he was challenged – in English. The Germans realized what was happening and a battle ensued, which resulted in several casualties.

By the fourth day of action, the Company had almost exhausted of its ammunition. The Captain had established a roadblock and driven off two enemy attacks, one of which involved two German tanks. There were several casualties. When the remaining ammunition was pooled and redistributed, each man had less than 10 rounds. Of the 200 plus members of I Company, Captain Hald could account for only 15. The remainder had been wounded, killed, captured, or simply lost. Those 15 men held the position until they were relieved.

As a result of this and other actions, the Captain would be awarded two Silver Stars for Gallantry; three Bronze stars with V Device for Heroic Achievement; two Purple Hearts; a presidential citation, a Combat Infantry Badge; and nine other campaign and service medals.

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